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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR ENGAGES PROMINENT LABOR LEADER

REF: REF A: 09 BOGOTA 3027; REF B: 09 BOGOTA 2958
REF C: 09 BOGOTA 3343; REF D: 09 BOGOTA 3031; REF E: 10 BOGOTA 309

SUMMARY

11. (U) The Ambassador expressed USG support for the essential role unions play in healthy democratic societies in a February 17 meeting with the Colombian Confederation of Workers (CTC). The CTC is one of the three main labor confederations in Colombia, with 120,000 members organized into approximately 450 unions concentrated in the agricultural, agro-industrial, metallurgical, financial, and public sectors. The meeting, which involved a discussion of U.S. trade and military policies on Colombia, was part of Post's proactive human/labor rights strategy (Reftels A-C). Immediately following their discussion, the Ambassador repeated his message to the press, although journalists were more interested in discussing the USG response to the Colombian Supreme Court's decision to deny a recent U.S. extradition request. End Summary.

A WIDE-RANGING DISCUSSION

12. (SBU) In a cordial meeting with the Ambassador, CTC President Luis Miguel Morantes Alfonso raised the violent persecution of the labor movement; the illegal use of Associated Worker Cooperatives (AWC) as labor intermediaries; the effects of widespread, forced displacement on workers; and the false positives scandal (military murders falsely presented as combat kills). Morantes also used the opportunity to criticize the U.S.-Colombian Trade Promotion Agreement (CTPA) and the Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA). The Ambassador told Morantes that the CTC could count on USG support for fundamental labor rights, including the right to associate, negotiate, and strike. He stressed that the solution to displacement must involve assistance with the option to return or stay, taking into account the situations and desires of those affected. Moreover, given the dramatic reduction in the number of new false positive cases, the task at hand is to identify and hold

the perpetrators accountable. The Ambassador said the CTPA would boost overall economic activity and employment, while the DCA simply updated existing bilateral agreements concerning cooperation against illicit trafficking, illegal armed groups, and terrorism.

CTC WILL REMAIN ENGAGED IN LABOR VIOLENCE STUDY

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13. (U) The Ambassador stressed the importance of the CTC's continued participation in a multi-institutional study led by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) that aims to analyze the root causes of labor violence in Colombia (Reftel D). The Ambassador said it was important to arrive at a baseline conclusion regarding labor violence on which everyone -- the GOC, business groups, labor, and the international community -- could agree. Morantes said the CTC intended to remain fully engaged in the UNDP study.

PRESS FOCUSES ON EXTRADITION DENIAL

14. (U) Following their meeting, the Ambassador and Morantes both addressed the media. The Ambassador gave brief remarks, stating that "strong and independent unions are essential, crucial elements of democracy." The meeting received coverage in broadcast media with emphasis on an unrelated question the Ambassador received about the Colombian Supreme Court's February 17 decision to deny a U.S. request for the extradition of former United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) leader Edwar Cobos Tellez, alias "Diego Vecino" (Reftel E). La FM radio (80,000 listeners) covered the meeting, as did CM& (publically-owned, national news channel with 507,000 viewers). RCN Radio (second largest radio network, right of center, with 6,759,400 listeners and an Internet audience of 12,000,000) focused on Morantes' comments regarding the CTC's opposition to the CTPA.

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